No. 27. God the Architect of nature.

Psalm 74th, 17th, 18th, Verses.

The day is thine, and the night is thine: Thou haſt prepared the light and the sun.

Thou haſt set all the borders of the earth: Thou haſt made summer and winter.

To reflect upon the works of nature, and, with an attentive eye, to contemplate the several parts of the Universe—to consider the beautiful order of the seasons, and the happy tendency and disposition of things in this lower world, for the use and service of mankind, is an employment highly worthy a reasonable mind; 'tis an employment entertaining in itself, and of the utmost use in its consequences; as it teaches us to look up to the great Author of nature, and to admire His wisdom and goodness, and disposes us to a firm trust and dependence upon Him—it inspires us with a grateful sense of His mercies, who preserves us thro' all the variety of the seasons, from those accidents and maladies to which we are perpetually exposed, and

teaches us to apply ourselves humbly unto Him, in whose hands is the direction of all events, for the continuance of His favors and blessings.

That our present meditations may contribute something to these good ends, it is intended to make some reflections upon these words of the Psalmist.

The day is thine, saith the Prophet, and the night is thine. This difference of day and night, and the perpetual succession of one to the other, is what falls under the observation of all men, nay what the very animals and plants seem to have a sense of. But there are few who attend sufficiently to the wonder of it.

The Royal Prophet (Psalm 19th) reckons the day and night amongst the most illustrious proofs of the glory of God. "The heavens declare the glory of "God, and the firmament sheweth His handy-work— "one day telleth another, and one night certifieth ano- "ther." What is there more equal and constant, more fixed and certain than the order of day and night; and that not only in one country or climate, but in all the

regions of the earth that we have any knowledge of? Not to speak here of those admirable proportions that are observed in the increase and diminution of each of them. Nor will it solve the matter to bring in a chain of causes necessarily dependent upon each other; for this, I presume, is what is meant by the necessity of nature. But this must at last carry us up to some first Cause and Mover, or otherwise it is wholly unintelligible. For as in a piece of Clock-work, the regular motion of the hand depends upon that of the wheels, and the adjustment of these upon the skill of the Artist, who has put them together in so nice and exact a manner, which could never have otherwise been so happily arranged: So likewise in the great machine of the universe, the succession of day and night carries our thoughts to the motion of the earth and the disposition of the air, which are the more immediate causes of it—but these likewise depend upon other causes, and all at last must be referred to the dexterity of an All-wise and Powerful Artist, who has so adjusted things as to give them a

dependence upon one another, from whence the beauty of the whole arises. And, as in the works of art, there is need of the hand of the workman, not only in the first structure of the machine, but likewise to keep it in order after it is once put together; so likewise in the system of the world is there occasion for the continual inspection and frequent interposition of the great Author of nature, to keep up the beautiful order of things, which, without His providential care, would be disconcerted in their motions, and fall into the utmost disorder and confusion.

Let us now consider the excellent purposes which this beautiful distinction of light and darkness is made to answer. The day serves to enlighten the world, and discovers to us the beauties of it. It sets all the parts of the world in motion, gives heat to the air, and invigorates the earth, putting it into a right disposition for the production of plants and fruits. Without it the world would be a hideous scene of confusion, without order, action, or comeliness, being lost in a state of in-

sensibility, and plunged in darkness worse than Egyptian. As to the night, tho', it must be owned, its obscurity has something formidable in it, such as would at first sight induce us to think it rather detrimental than useful, yet upon reflection we shall find the case to be quite otherwise; the day is thine, says the Psalmist, and the night is thine. As if he had said that, notwithstanding its solemn and dark appearance, which might induce some people to think it the production of a Being less kind and merciful, yet it is the work of an All-wise and gracious God, as well as the day. And indeed if we consider it aright, we shall find the one not less necessary than the other. For, in the first place, the night, in its turn, discovers to us a part of the Universe, and that a very beautiful one too. So that its darkness may be said in this sense to enlighten us, as it shews us the ornaments and furniture of Heaven, the planets and stars, and their admirable disposition, their aspects and motion, which the day had hid from us. But the wisdom and goodness of the

Creator are not less conspicuous in the manner of this dispensation, than in the gift itself. For both the nature of man and of other animals is such, that it is not able to bear a labor and fatigue too continued, and lengthened out beyond bounds, which wastes their spirits and impairs their constitutions; they require therefore, from time to time, some refreshment, to restore their strength and renew their vigour. The All-wise Creator has wonderfully provided for their necessities, by adjusting the succession of day and night in such a manner, that they regularly follow each other in the space of twenty-four hours. The wholesome and agreeable mixture of night and day, succeeding each other at such short intervals, causes the pleasant vicissitude of labor and rest, watching and sleep—by these means refreshing and enlivening the several Animals, and renewing their strength and vigour.

The Psalmist points out to us, in the next place the means appointed and used by Providence for keeping up this order of nature. Thou hast prepared the light

and the sun. The Sun dispenses his light and heat to this lower world, in the most regular and uniform manner, and lengthens or shortens our days, varies and diversifies our seasons, according as this our earth, in her annual motion round his glorious body, approaches nearer or removes to a greater distance from him, and receives his beams darted upon her more directly, or obliquely. Now as the presence of the sun in our horizon forms the day, his absence causes the night—which, lest it should be destitute of all beauty and light, God has provided for it in a wonderful manner: for, besides the brightness of the stars, which serve very much to soften its horror and obscurity, He has moreover planted the moon in the heavens, which, receiving upon her solid and dark body the rays of the sun, reflects them back again to us, in a greater or less proportion, according to her different aspects, oppositions and situation: sometimes we observe her whole body enlightened, sometimes only half or a fourth part of it; and when in her monthly revolution about the

earth, she is directly between the sun and us, then the dark side of her body is turned to us, and of consequence she cannot be seen at all by us. Such is the beautiful variety discoverable in the course and motions of this Planet! Such the laws it has been made to observe by the All-wise Creator during so many ages!

The next observation in the order of my text is, Thou hast set all the borders of the earth. Now, if we consider the body of the earth a solid and compact mass of matter, divided from all the other elements, and confined within the bounds of its own proper nature, suspended in the midst of the air, and exposed to all the storms and tempests of that boisterous element, and yet still maintaining its own situation, we must acknowledge this to be an admirable effect of the Providence of God. Then as to the sea, which is in such a manner joined with the earth, as to make up together one globe, however restless and turbulent that element may have been, yet has it never been able to transgress the bounds set to its rage by the Creator, who has said,

"hitherto shalt thou go, and no further." But besides this general disposition, we may consider the surface of the earth itself, divided into different regions and countries—the Islands which are separated from all the rest of the world, by the waters surrounding them on every side—extensive Countries disjoined from each other, and bounded—some by lofty mountains—others by great arms of the sea—some by wide rivers—others by deserts and forests—as if they were purposely laid out by Providence, for the receptacles and habitations of different nations and people. Now all this diversity, the Psalmist, in the text, must be understood to assure us, is the work of that All-wise Being, who has set all the borders of the earth. And indeed, if we could be supposed, as it were, from some height and eminence, to take a view of the whole earth—to mark the several divisions of it, their respective boundaries—the seas and lakes, the mountains and forests, the rivers and deserts, could we contemplate the surface, in one place, gay and blooming, in another horrid and dismal, covered over

with ice and snow——here cut into trenches and furrows——there clothed with all the beauties and riches of the field——in this part adorned with cities, and towns, and villages——in another desolate and uninhabited——could we moreover observe the difference amongst the inhabitants of the several parts of the Globe, in nature and constitution, complexion and habit——such a view as this would transport us with admiration, and make us join with the Psalmist in that pious exclamation, "O Lord, our Governor, how excellent is thy name "in all the earth!"

I come now to the last observation in the text. The Prophet tells us, that the same All-powerful Being, which has ordained the day and the night, which has prepared the light and the sun, and set all the borders of the earth, has likewise made summer and winter. Now these two seasons divide the year, much in the same manner as the day and night do the twenty-four hours——and there is a pretty near resemblance in the effects and operations of the one and the other.

The ſummer clothes the earth with a beautiful verdure, adorns it with fruits and flowers, and cheers and enlivens the face of it. The winter, on the contrary, ſpoils it of its beauties, leaves it naked and deſtitute, and deprives it of its heat and life. And yet, notwithſtanding, very neceſsary and uſeful is this change of the ſeaſons. The ſummer provides for the ſupport and nouriſhment of men and animals, and brings forth, in great variety and abundance, all the neceſsaries and conveniences of life. And as to the winter, tho' it looks like the decline and diſſolution of nature, yet it is really, in its turn, ſubſervient to the uſe and advantage of the world, as it moiſtens and refreſhes the earth, which is very much exhauſted and parched with the heats of the ſeaſon foregoing, as it impregnates the body of the earth, with thoſe nitrous particles which fall in great abundance in the ſnows and hoar froſts, thereby rendering it prolific, and more apt for the generation of plants and fruits in the enſuing ſeaſons; inſomuch that it has been a general obſervation founded

upon experience, that the more severe this part of the year has been, the more fruitful and more delightful have the following seasons proved.

In this wonderful manner does God provide for His creatures, by this happy distinction of times, which is equally certain and regular with the succession of day and night. And in this vicissitude there is one thing that must not be forgot; that as nature cannot pass from one extreme to another which would greatly endanger the whole constitution, the wisdom of our Creator has provided a remedy for this inconvenience, by so ordering that the summer does not immediately succeed the winter, but the spring is made to pass between them, which, by its sweet and moderate warmth, disposes the whole animal creation, by degrees, for the more intense heat which is to follow. So in like manner does the Autumn succeeding the summer, as it partakes of the qualities of each season, prepare us for the rigours of the approaching winter.

But what has been said is sufficient, by way of

observation, upon this beautiful order of Providence. For it is not the design of the Prophet in the text, to give us merely a Lecture in natural philosophy: he does not reflect upon these wonderful works with any other view, but for his own edification and comfort, that, by these observations upon the power and goodness of his Maker, he may confirm his faith and affiance in Him. Let us contemplate this beauteous portrait of Providence. But let us not fix our senses entirely there. Let us raise our thoughts to the great Author of nature, and see Him in His works. Let the reflection upon the order and harmony of the creation, teach us to celebrate the infinite wisdom of the great Creator. Let us, observing the good and useful ends for which every thing was made, extol His goodness who has so kindly provided for us. Let the grandeur and magnificence of the Heavenly Bodies lead us to ascribe to His Almighty Power, the glory due to it. And let the conclusion of all our observations always be to adore, obey, honor, and love with a hearty affection, re-

verence, and obedience, our holy and glorious, our good and merciful Lord and Sovereign. "For asmuch as "there is none like unto Thee, O Lord, Thou art great, "and thy name is great in might. Who would not "fear Thee, O King of nations!"

When the day salutes us every morning with its beautiful light, let us consider it as an effect of the goodness of God—that it is designed to awaken nature, and call all the creatures to their respective employments. Let us not then be the only inactive Beings in the Universe—but after blessing and praising God, let us apply ourselves with vigour to the duties of our station. Let us each in our proper sphere, imitate the activity of that glorious Luminary the Sun, who runs the race marked out for him, with indefatigable diligence. And when the night comes to envelope the world in obscurity, let us reflect that, however solemn its appearance, this likewise is the gift of God. Let us consider the end for which it was created, the refreshment and repose of nature—and let us not abuse it by spending any part of

it "in the works of darkneſs;" but rather let us employ ſome portion of its ſilence and retirement, in reflecting on the wonders of creation and Providence. Let us conſider alſo that obedience, which is paid by all the parts of the earth, to the Divine appointment. "God "has ſet them their bounds, which, we find, they do "not paſs," but remain immoveably fixed in their proper ſituation.

Let this remind us to keep within our own proper ſphere, being firmly attached to the duties of our ſtation and calling. Let us particularly attend to that boundary which diſtinguiſhes us from the reſt of the world, I mean the profeſſion of piety, and the belief of the Goſpel of Chriſt. Let us keep within our own proper limits, and not tranſgreſs the laws of the Goſpel.

To conclude. Let the perpetual revolution of nature, the tranſition from day to night and from night to day—from ſummer to winter and from winter to ſummer, put us in mind of the inconſtancy and viciſſitude of all things in this lower world, and carry

our thoughts and desires beyond the grave. Let us reflect that the present system of things, however regular and beautiful, is yet corruptible and perishable. And let us endeavor to secure to ourselves an inheritance in that new world which our Lord hath promised us; which, we are assured, will be the seat of righteousness and the habitation of immortality—where we shall enjoy constant day without the succession of night—perpetual summer without fearing the returns of winter—where we shall begin a year which will never have an end, but shall remain fixed and unalterable, not subject to any of those changes and alterations, which time produces in this lower world; JESUS the eternal Son of God shall be our SUN—His glorious presence our DAY—Heaven and Eternity our INHERITANCE—and the perpetual enjoyment of the most ravishing pleasures OUR LIFE!

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